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Comparative Analysis of English and Indonesian Proverbs: Revealing Cultural Significances & Values

Jepri

Universitas Hasanuddin Makassar, Indonesia

Email: jepri@uniba-bpn.ac.id

Noer Jihad Saleh

Universitas Hasanuddin Makassar, Indonesia

Email: noerjihadsaeh239@gmail.com

Fathu Rahman

Universitas Hasanuddin Makassar, Indonesia

Email: fathu.rahman@unhas.ac.id

Prasuri Kuswarini

Universitas Hasanuddin Makassar, Indonesia

Email: prasurikuswarini@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to find the of similarities and differences between English and Indonesian proverbs as well as to reveal the cultural significances and values of these two languages. This research conducts a descriptive qualitative. The data collection procedure is simak and catat (read and write) and this research applies padan (identity) method and in which the instrument is each language's cultural values. This study employs the theory of proverb and the theory of cultural values and cultural significance. The findings show that both English and Indonesian proverb have different in style of sentence but they are equivalent in meaning and cultural significance and values. This study reveals that both English and Indonesian as languages that are separated by continent and the length of time of development of the language but they are sharing equivalent cultural values and significance that is a prove the moral values are universal.

Keywords

Comparative Analysis, Descriptive qualitative, Cultural significance, Cultural

value, Proverb,

Introduction

Based on the definition proposed by Campbell, Proverbs are determined as fixed expressions that are exceptional and contain educational values. Moral education has in proverbs cultivated shared feelings among people and improved someone's commitment to being much more responsible in doing the action. (Campbell, 2008)

There is abundant research conducted separately by scholars regarding the proverb's phenomenon. They are fully motivated to study academically identifying, classifying, verifying, and validating the proverbs in the aspects of linguistics elements and functions as well cultural values. Proverbs are considered to have distinctive linguistic forms. Elsewhere, they are defined as 'the wisdom of many, the wit of one (Dundes, 1981).

Proverbs also have the unique ability to show cultural values in society since they are the wisdom of many. Cultural values are representing the implicitly or explicitly shared abstract ideas about what is good, right, and desirable in a society. (William, 1970), obviously, this definition has a broader meaning that could be related to any prevailing cultural values or practices in a society such as arts, architecture, songs, dances, beliefs and norms, and many more. They are something that is living among the people and desirable which justifies the behavioural choices of people. Those insights are portrayed either denotatively or connotatively in the proverbs.

Proverbs widely use in communication around the world because they are memorable and scholarly. Proverbs fulfil the human need to summarize experiences and observations into nuggets of wisdom that provide ready-made comments on personal relationships and social affairs (Mieder, 2004:1) Moreover, he stated that A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation. (Mieder 1985: 119; also, in Mieder 1993: 24). So, based on the definition above the writer focuses this study on cultural values using comparative analysis to reveal the phenomenon between two unrelated languages; English and Indonesian languages.

The very well-known proverb cover about the two languages, as discussed in this section is "*Don't bite off more than you can chew.*" While Indonesian people say the equivalent of that proverb as "*Lebih besar pasak dari pada tiang*" (Bigger wedge than pole). They are equivalent in meaning but have different structures and expressions. They are not appearing coincidentally in both languages but they are built from cultural motives to share values among them. These two languages

are different structures and expressions as well as unrelated; different cultural backgrounds but they have the same motives on meanings and share the same cultural values.

The comparative analysis employed in this study is encompassing comparison since this method is essentially applied in the process of comparing two proverbial texts either in the sentential or phrasal forms to differ their similarities and differences and it places different of expression in English and Indonesian proverbs but they are in the same system of proverbs' function such as advising, warning, criticizing, encouraging, informing and expressing a feeling that is very related to the cultural values being uttered by proverbs users in communication as the system of a whole. it is in line with Pickvance's statement about proverbs (2005).

This study also means to reveal the cultural significances of the two proverbs through the lexemes the are used to convey the meaning or the messages. Cultural significance is stated in Burra charter (a set of principles of nationally accepted standard for heritage conversation practice in Australia) a concept that guides people to understand of estimating the value of places. The meaning of this term of cultural significance refers to a comprise aesthetic value which includes aspects of sensory perception for which criteria such as form, scale, colour, texture, design and material of the fabric is essential; historic value encompasses the actions of historic figures, historic events, phases or activities.

According to Pickvance (2005), he states that comparative analysis explains and gains a better understanding of the causal process involved in the creation of an event, feature, or relationship...Conventionally, comparative analysis emphasized the explanation of differences, and the explanation of similarities in this study are related to the proverbs being compared: English and Indonesian proverbs.

This paper discusses those two unrelated languages contrastively; English and Indonesian proverbs in order to answer the problems of this study they are (1) to find and to explain descriptively (1) the analogy of similarities and differences between English and Indonesian proverbs and (2) to reveal the cultural values of these two languages. The coverage of the analysis of this study is proverbs in both languages have the meaning or equivalent but they are different in structure and expression.

Materials and Method

This study applies a qualitative descriptive method that depicts and explicates the data which originates from the internet source in the form of proverbs. This study engages some steps which are operated by some methods and techniques. First is data collection employing 'simak' (reading) as the method

and 'catat' (noting) as the technique. Simak (reading) has been conducted at the time the writer was searching the English proverbs that have an equivalent meaning to Indonesian proverbs then it is followed by 'catat' (noting) technique when the writer found and examined the proverbs are trustworthy and valid (their equivalencies) to be used as the data of this study. So, the writer is an instrument for validating the data as the writer is an Indonesian native who naturally and educationally has linguistics competence.

The data of proverbs should have equivalent in meaning, either the lexemes are different or similar and the step requires analysis of data. It is conducting a 'padan' translational method as proposed by Sudaryanto (1993):

"Metode padan adalah metode analisis data yang alat penentunya berada di luar, terlepas, dan tidak menjadi bagian dari bahasa (langue) yang bersangkutan atau diteliti. Teknik dasar yang digunakan adalah teknik pilah unsur penentu (PUP)". (Sudaryanto, 1993:13).

Sudaryanto's statement above is translated (direct) into English as follow:

"The equivalent method is a data analysis method in which the determining tool is outside, detached, and not part of the language being studied. The basic technique used is the determinant element sorting technique". (Sudaryanto, 1993:13).

So, this study applies as suggested by Sudaryanto above. The analysis method that determines the factor is detached, outside of the analyzed language. And last but not least is presenting the result of the study after conducting analyses both formal and informal. In this study, the writer uses verbal explanation which is utilizing a form of a table as a visualization to have an excellent understanding.

Discussion

Proverbs are living wits and wisdom to advise people to always consciously live with preferable values believed and accepted by society. "A proverb is a concise statement of an apparent truth which has currency among the people" (Gallacher, 1959: 47). This statement is hardly unaccepted and there are a lot of truth that proverbs are strongly reflect the cultural values.

This study is an attempt to empower the wisdom of proverbs by revealing the cultural values that exist in them, in this study are English and Indonesian proverbs. Additionally, the differences and similarities of cultural values that proverbs have are very academically valuable to be known widely. In attempting to answer those questions, the writer utilizes a table displaying some English and Indonesian proverb which is equivalent in meaning to each other that is practically used in both languages. The discussion of this paper is based on the table below:

No.	Proverbs		Meaning	Function	Cultural Values
	English	Indonesian			
1.	Still waters run deep	Air tenang menghanyutkan	The meaning of both proverbs is similar which says that people who are quiet and calm are often very intelligent and wise.	Informing	Wisdom-Knowledge
2.	Don't bite a hand that feeds you	Air susu dibalas air tuba	This proverb criticizes people who are ungrateful and show bad attitudes and behaviour toward people who have helped them.	Ordering/Commanding	Wisdom-Norms
3.	Where there is sugar, there are bound to be ants.	Ada gula ada semut	It is a popular knowledge and common expression of telling where there are opportunities, there are always crowded people attracted to the opportunities.	Encouraging	Wisdom-Knowledge
4.	Many hands make light work	Berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing	Both of the proverbs are telling wisdom that hard or heavy work can be done easily and quickly if they work together purposively.	Advising	Wisdom-Norms
5.	Don't bite off more than you can chew.	Besar pasak dari pada tiang	This proverb advises us that we should not do something that is too difficult or too much to be done.	Advising/Criticizing	Wisdom-Norms
6.	Bad workers blame their tools	Buruk muka cermin dibelah	It is stated that someone who is incompetent to do work and has a poor-quality job or dissatisfied result usually will lay the blame on the quality of the tools or equipment.	Criticizing	Wisdom-Norms
7.	Give him an inch and he will take the yard.	Dikasih hati minta jantung	Both of the proverbs warn us that We should be attentively aware to help ungrateful people since these kinds of people are demanding more and much more if we give them a little they will ask much more.	Warning	Wisdom-Norms
8.	Robbing Peter to pay Paul	Gali lobang tutup lobang	Both of the proverbs are portraying people metaphorically. they tell us about a person who pays his debts by borrowing others' money which makes his debts bigger and bigger, and at last, he cannot pay his all debts.	Criticizing	Wisdom-Norms
9.	A penny saved is a penny gained	Hemat pangkal kaya	Both of the proverbs are suggesting us to spend our money economically and save the money to be used in the future to buy much more important things.	Advising	Wisdom-Knowledge
10.	No use crying over the spilt milk	Nasi sudah jadi bubur	both of the proverbs express similar things. they advise us to accept things that have been gone or to face patiently and open-heartedly at all disappointing events that have happened.	Advising	Wisdom - Knowledge

The table above shows similarities and differences between those two proverbs, the meaning as they are shown are equivalent but the way the proverbs express the meaning through the type of sentence is different.

In English proverbs, the types of sentences are varied; Imperative and declarative either negative or interrogative while Indonesian proverbs show one type of sentence only, it is declarative and all of the sentences are positive forms. imperative sentences are not found in Indonesian proverbs.

English and Indonesian proverb are similar in the way delivering their messages. both of them use metaphorical expressions. the similarities of using metaphorical expression but in different words or lexemes which will be discussed in the next paragraph of this paper as well as to reveal the cultural values they convey. The discussion below based on the table above.

Still waters run deep - Air tenang menghanyutkan

The meaning of the two proverbs, English and Indonesian as written in the table above are equivalent but they have different lexemes to convey the metaphorical meaning of the messages. Both of the sentences are declarative sentences, and the subject of the two proverbs is almost similar either in the lexeme or in the phrase. First, the Lexeme '*water*' is compared to the lexeme '*air*' (water), they are equivalent. The attributive adjectives '*still*' and '*tenang*' which is attached to lexeme '*water*' and '*air*' construct noun phrase '*still water*' and '*air tenang*' where the meaning of '*tenang*' is similar to '*quiet/silent/calm*' in English and lexeme '*still*' is '*not moving*' or '*making a sound*'. thus, in the level of word/lexeme as well as in the level of phase, they are equivalent.

Culturally water refers to a faith-based tradition for English or Indonesian people. the cultural significance of '*water*' and '*air*' (water) is symbolizing 'life', 'purity' or 'purifying', or renewal'. So, the lexemes '*water*' or '*air*' (water)' is collocated with '*still*' and '*tenang*' (calm/quiet/silent) creating another cultural significance that is 'wisdom' or 'intelligent' to portray an intelligent or wise person is described as 'still water' in English and 'air tenang' (silent water) in Indonesian.

The predicates of these two proverbs are '*run deep*' compared to '*menghanyutkan*'. The meaning of run deep means '*moving strongly*' while '*menghanyutkan*' means causing 'drifting away' So, even though they are almost similar, the phrase '*run deep*' portrays a strong motion while in the word '*menghanyutkan*' portrays something causing danger. So, the English proverb portrays a person who is intelligent, powerful, and wise with the positive expression '*still waters run deep*', it is an emphasizing to others while in Indonesian is a warning since the meaning of '*air tenang menghanyutkan*' (literal: silent water is causing drifting away) conveys a dangerous thing. The Indonesian proverb expressing something positive but in negative way. The cultural significance is revealed as explained in this section while the cultural values both English and Indonesian proverb are describing about '*knowledge and wisdom*' as shown in the table above.

Don't bite a hand that feeds you - Air susu dibalas air tuba

The English proverb is constructed using an imperative sentence. while the

Indonesian proverb is a declarative sentence. The first is giving an order or a command while the Indonesian proverb is a statement that a good deed is paid by an ill action. The English proverb '*Don't bite a hand that feeds you*' is an order or a command to others that they should not pay a good deed with an ill action while Indonesian proverb '*Air susu dibalas air tuba*' (literal translation: '*milk is paid with tuba water*') (*tuba* in Latin *derris elliptica*, a kind of plant that contains a strong poison for plants and fish used to catch fish by poisoning the with this 'tuba' so, the other translation of '*Air susu dibalas air tuba*' is '*Milk is paid by poison*').

The English proverb '*Don't bite a hand that feeds you*' is an imperative sentence with positive order or command, it is an ordering or a commanding to pay good deeds with good things in return while '*air susu dibalas air tuba*' is a positive declarative sentence but in negative expression. this proverb is intended to condemn or insult the person who is ungrateful because he pays good deeds with an ill action, so this proverb is condemning or insulting.

The phrase '*a hand feeds you*' is compared to '*air susu*'. Cultural significance of 'hand' based on Aristotle's term is 'tool of tools' but in general it refers to strength, power, and protection and it can be interpreted as generosity, hospitality and stability as in the phrase 'give a hand' or 'lend a hand' while '*susu*' (milk) has cultural significance in Indonesia, caring, loving, mother's love, growing or raising, best food.

By the explanation above we understand that in the level of lexeme and phrase the two proverbs have different cultural significances or cultural values, in the English proverb the lexeme *hand* signifies a help or protection' while lexeme '*susu*' signifies caring or loving the cultural values of both proverbs are similar, they are talking about wisdom – norms.

Where there is sugar, there are bound to be ants - Ada gula ada semut

Both of the proverbs are using similar words, "*sugar – gula and ants – semut*" the structure of English and Indonesian proverbs are also almost identic both of them using complex sentence where in English proverb the complex sentence is used completely, it is using subordinative conjunction '*where*' but in Indonesian proverb, the complex sentence is not complete because the presence of subordination conjunction is omitted. '*Ada gula*' (there is sugar), there is (*ada*) and *gula* (sugar), also in the right-side sentence is identic; "*ada semut*" (there is ant) so, *ada gula ada semut* in English is '*there is sugar there is ant*' without conjunction. The Presence of conjunction is considered understood already.

The cultural significance of sugar in both languages is almost similar in which in the historical context of transatlantic trade, culturally having sugar means they have a high economic and social class. Sugar is culturally signifying energy, wealth, and social status. In the Indonesian language sugar (*gula*) also refers to anything that is sweet including a concubine or secret lover that is considered, so in Indonesian '*gula-gula*' (a metaphor for a concubine or secret lover).

Many hands make light work - Berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing

Their meaning, both English and Indonesian proverbs are equivalent or identical to each other. They are talking about the work will be done easily and lighter if the work is done together but, those two proverbs are using different expressions.

In English, it is used "hand" to complete the job while in Indonesian emphasizes teamwork, it is used 'pikul' (shouldered) and 'Jinjing' (carried) to emphasize teamwork when the work is heavier it is suggested to be 'dipikul' (shouldered together) and when it is lighter it is done carried by hand together as well.

The cultural significance of hand is 'strength', 'protection', 'helping', 'giving', which are similar in Indonesian culture so, both English and Indonesian proverbs are not only similar in meaning but also in the cultural significance of the lexeme are used. "Dipikul' (shouldered) has similar cultural significance as generated in 'hand' such as showing 'strength', 'protecting', 'a place to cry on' to be peaceful and calm. The cultural values of those two proverbs are similar, they are advising to work in a team when we have a heavier work to be done. The cultural value is similar. Both of the proverbs suggest us to do the work together to make it effectively and efficiently.

Don't bite off more than you can chew - Besar pasak dari pada tiang

The English proverb uses lexemes 'bite' and 'chew' which 'bite' culturally significances about hurting people or make someone in danger situation while 'chew' means consume some food slowly by smoothing the food using our teeth so, both of the lexemes are showing actions using teeth as a helping tools either to hurt people or to consume some food. It is depending on the person of using the teeth, it can be a helping tool to consume the food or can be used as a weapon to hurt or to protect. This proverb means that we should not force ourselves to do something unaffordable to do or it needs more power or strength to do than we have or available.

While Indonesian proverb is used lexemes 'pasak' (wedge) and 'tiang' (pole) which culturally 'pasak' (wedge) is a tiny thing that uses to support something else to be stable and 'tiang' (pole) culturally signifies something support or bear bigger things and to be stable it needs a wedge to cover the small hole that makes the pole stable. This Indonesian proverb means equivalent to the English proverb but they have different of expressing the meaning. Both of the proverbs convey the sane cultural value that is an advice that we should not do something that unaffordable according to our capacity.

Bad workers blame their tools - Buruk muka cermin dibelah

These two proverbs means equivalent to each other but again they have

different way of expressing the message. The English proverb uses lexeme 'blame' and 'toil' while in Indonesian proverb uses '*muka*' (face) and '*cermin*' (mirror). '*Buruk muka*' (ugly face), '*cermin dibelah*' (mirror is smashed). From the action taken, the Indonesian proverb is quite more vulgar than the English proverb 'to blame' versus 'to smash' or 'to break'. Culturally their lexemes are different 'blaming' is only an abstract action but 'breaking/smashing' is more concrete action not only by finding a black sheep for a bad thing we have or we did.

Give him an inch and he will take the yard - Dikasih hati minta jantung

These two proverbs either English or Indonesian proverb conveys similar meaning even though they are different in expression of delivering the meaning. They are depicting or describing an ungrateful person that he will take bigger and bigger and never be satisfied of what he has taken or given to him.

In expressing the meaning these two proverbs are different. The English proverb uses lexemes 'inch' and 'yard' to compare a smaller and a bigger thing while in Indonesian proverb uses 'hati' (a kindness, literarily means 'heart') and 'jantung' (a pumping blood organ) to show a smaller thing compares to the bigger one.

Both proverbs are talking of a measurement of someone's personality. English proverb uses more logic lexemes than Indonesian proverb that identifies the personality using 'hati' and 'jantung' to show how greedy the person that we have already helped.

Robbing Peter to pay Paul - Gali lobang tutup lobang

Either an English proverb or an Indonesian proverb tells a similar thing. They are describing a person who is struggling to pay his debts. This person makes another debt to pay the previous debt. The person asks or makes bigger debt to pay his previous smaller debt and finally he cannot afford to pay his debts at all because his debt is bigger and bigger.

The English proverb uses lexemes 'rob' and 'pay' which has a cultural significance as negative acts that breaks the law while pay, in this term to pay debt. It is depicting how a person to solve his problem by making bigger problem. It is a temporary solution, basically it not a solution at all, but making bigger problem at the end so, borrowing money from others to pay our debt is a temporary solution.

The Indonesian proverb uses '*gali*' (dig), '*tutup*' (close), '*lubang*' (hole) which means literarily '*gali*' (dig) is to move hard-packed earth out of the way, especially downward to make a hole with a shovel but in this case, he/she digs a bigger hole to borrow someone's money to pay his debt (smaller). It culturally signifies a grave digging for him/herself since the holes she/he digs deeper and bigger and at the end she/cannot be able to go out from the hole she/he digs up.

Those two proverbs are equivalent in meaning but different ways of delivering the message. The English proverb is using 'robbing' while Indonesian is using 'digging' (gali). The Indonesian proverb metaphorizes the danger by using 'dig a hole' as if it is digging a grave for ourselves.

A penny saved is a penny gained - Hemat pangkal kaya

The English proverb emphasizes the importance of saving even though it is a small amount of money. It is what we earn. It says that it is useless to have a big salary or income but we do not have any left for more important use in the future while Indonesian proverb emphasises the importance of being economical spending of what we have earned, by doing this we can save our money for the more important use in the future.

English proverb uses lexemes 'penny', 'save', and 'gain' which indicates (penny) a small amount of money or someone's wealth. They show and emphasize the amount of money (wealth) we have is the amount that we save which is 100% belonging to us. The message of this English proverb suggests we keep what we have earned even if it is a small amount of money but along with time the little money will be bigger and bigger as long as we do that consistently.

While Indonesian proverb uses lexemes "*hemat*" (thrifty) and "*kaya*" (rich) which indicates that everyone's who is spending their money economically (thrifty) will be rich in the future or the fundamental of being rich is to be thrifty in spending his/her money. In this proverb being thrifty indicates being rich.

There is similar and difference of these two proverbs, in English "save" indicates "rich" while Indonesian "thrifty" indicates "rich". They are equivalently having same message that is to be carefully spending the money. Thus, their cultural significance both English and Indonesian are similar.

No use crying over the spilt milk - Nasi sudah jadi bubur

The last proverbs are being discussed in this paper as shown above, "No use crying over the spilt milk" which is equivalent in meaning to the Indonesian proverb "Nasi sudah jadi bubur" {(literarily in English "Rice has become porridge" (overcooked))}, it could not be regretful, it has happened we cannot change it.

The cultural significance of milk is a symbol of motherhood, fertility, prosperity, health and strength. In Hinduism mythology it is a churning ocean of milk releases the nectar of immortality. Indonesian Proverb uses "rice" which is a symbol of providence and of a creation, and of blessing and joy. Both of lexemes either in English and Indonesian conveys quite similar symbol of culture but using different lexemes with equivalent goal, they are talking about blessing of God to the human beings.

Conclusion

It is known that English and Indonesian are two different languages which

are separated by continent and time of development quite far to each other but they have similar expression of wisdom through proverbs they have which talks about set rules of living and cultural values. The facts are revealed that both of the languages, English and Indonesian shared similar cultural significances and values through the proverb even though they have different diction or lexemes used.

The differences of English and Indonesian proverbs are unfolded in this study are the usage of style of sentences model but both of the languages are shared equivalent messages of wisdom. The proverbs prove that the moral values and wisdom are quite similar in any regions, the way of expressing is different while values are equivalent.

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